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Language and age identities among older Greek Cypriot women

Anna Charalambidou

This contribution discusses the language and social practices of older Greek Cypriot women. It looks at the casual, every-day interactions of an all-female group, with a long interactional history (most of them in their seventies). The ethnomethodological approach to identities is adopted, and a toolkit from membership categorisation analysis and conversation analysis is used. This paper shows how the participants employ various terms, with distinct meaning and associated features, to categorise self and others as "older women". The discussion includes certain emblematic uses of code-switching between (varieties of) Cypriot Greek and Standard Modern Greek and shows how this discourse strategy contributes to the construction of old-age identities with distinct associations. On the whole, this bottom-up analysis provides an overview of older Cypriot women's situated understanding of their age identities and how the deployment of various category labels of different registers ultimately achieves positive self-presentation and dissociation from age-induced decline.

1. Background and analytical framework

This chapter discusses the communicative practices of a group of older Greek Cypriot women. It analyses the use of explicit old-age categorisations, and by that I mean instances where old-age categorial terms in noun form were used, such as "κοτζάκαρη" ("old woman"), "ηλικιωμένη" ("elderly woman"), "γέρος" ("old man") etc. I have also taken into consideration, categorisations in verb form such as "εγέραςεν" ("she has aged") and also categorisations of chronological age "έκλεισα τα εβδομήντα τρία" ("I turned seventy-three"). Both self- and other-referential categories are taken into account. Additionally, the chapter discusses the identity implications of the use of old-age categories, as well as the function of register variation between (varieties of) Cypriot Greek and Standard Modern Greek in age categorisations.

1.1 Analytical framework

An interactional, micro-analytical approach, drawing on ethnomethodology is adopted (for overview volumes on ethnomethodology see Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984; Sharrock & Anderson, 1986; Button, 1991). Ethnomethodology is an empirical,

systematic study of the most commonplace, everyday activities on their own terms and its basic assumption is that social reality, social order and relations are jointly accomplished in the tiny details of talk and interaction. Ethnomethodology regards identities as a temporally and locally occasioned interactional achievement and not as a set of essential features that the individual carries across contexts passively and latently (see e.g. Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). Therefore, in the present study, the aim is not to theorise the function of ageing on language use, but to show what ageing and other categorisations are for the participants and how these categorisations inform locally ordered interactional practices and situated understanding of reality and the self (see e.g. Watson & Weinberg, 1982).

Membership Categorisation Analysis, an ethnomethodological apparatus for the analysis of the situated and reflexive use of the different categories of people, places, things that interlocutors employ in interaction, is used in this chapter to analyse participants' old-age categorisations (for seminal work in this framework see, primarily, Sacks, 1995, and also Watson, 1978; Jayyusi, 1984; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Silverman, 1998; Eglin & Hester, 2003; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009). According to Membership Categorisation Analysis, the categories interlocutors use are inference-rich, since the knowledge and experiences individuals have about the society are stored in these categories. No category is ever unambiguous, but category-bound activities and attributions help resolve ambiguities (Silverman, 2001:144). In practice, Membership Categorisation Analysis is employed to locate the categories participants use in carrying out their activities in and through talk, in organising knowledge and in assigning social identities.

1.2 Participants and their linguistic resources

The data used for this project are eighteen hours of self-recorded, everyday conversation of an all-female group of older Greek Cypriot friends, most of them in their seventies, aged 63-80, at the time of the recordings. The audio-recordings were supplemented by ethnographic interviews and extensive participant observation. The data collection was carried out between January 2007 and August 2008, and took place in a suburb of Nicosia, the Cypriot capital, where the informants live. The participants have primary-school education, have been residing in close vicinity for decades and have a long interactional history of meeting up at each other's houses. They recorded themselves with a digital recorder, whenever they met for coffee and the frequency of the recorded meetings ranged from several times week to once every fortnight. This long-standing friendship group consists of five main participants: Gregoria, 79; Loulla, 73; Charoulla 73; Myria, 72; and Tasoulla, 63.

The participants of this study mainly talk in Cypriot Greek (henceforth CG), employing a baseline register of mesolectal *koine*. CG is the variety of Greek spoken, primarily, by Greek Cypriots in Cyprus and which is normally classified as a dialect (see e.g. Goutsos & Karyolemou, 2004). CG is acquired at home and used in all face-to-face interactions among Greek Cypriots, whereas Standard Modern Greek

(henceforth SMG) is taught at school and used in writing and formal oral discourse, e.g. public speaking, broadcast speech (Pavlou & Papapavlou, 2004). Because CG is largely reserved for oral use, “it does not have a generally accepted orthography” (Arvaniti, 2010:20).¹ There are a number of phonological, morphological, semantic, pragmatic and lexicon differences between SMG and CG (for an overview, see e.g. Terkourafi, 2005).

Moreover, there is significant variation within CG. Research conducted in the sixties has shown that the basilectal end of the CG continuum consists of 18 regional patois varieties (Kontosopoulos, 1969:97). However, in recent years, and especially after the dramatic geodemographic changes that ensued after the summer of 1974, regional variation has been in retreat, giving prominence to a generalised CG *koine*, based on the regional variety of Mesaoria (Goutsos & Karyolemou, 2004:4). Although there is little regional variation in current CG, there is, however, differentiation between “town speech” and “village speech” (Tsiplakou, 2004:3; Terkourafi, 2005:319; Arvaniti, 2010:18). “Village speech” (*χωρικάτικα*) is the basilect of the dialect continuum, that is the variety which is further away from SMG and is stereotypically associated with low levels of education, the elderly, and rural areas, whereas “town speech” is the acrolectal variety of CG, which is closer to, but still distinct from, SMG (Pavlou, 2004:11). Speakers are aware of the different varieties of CG and often understand themselves as speakers of a mesolectal variety (Goutsos & Karyolemou, 2004:4).

In practice, however there is a continuum of usage between local SMG, acrolectal and basilectal CG (Goutsos & Karyolemou, 2004:7). Also, as Terkourafi has argued, the variations of CG rather than being associated with the rural-urban continuum, are more related to register shifts: more basilectal varieties index a more informal style and more acrolectal varieties a more formal style (Tsiplakou, 2009:1198; cf. Terkourafi, 2005:326). In fact, because of the historical similarities between SMG and CG and the continuum-internal variation of CG, it is very hard to differentiate between speakers’ continuum-internal switches and linguistic moves outside the continuum (Tsiplakou, 2009). Tsiplakou (2009) proposes phonetic (as opposed to morphological, syntactic and lexical) variants as a mostly reliable indicator of the two types of code-switching.

2. Analysis and discussion

2.1 Culture-specific age labels and their distribution in the data

In this section I focus on the most frequent form of explicit old-age categorisations, that is, *generic* categorisations in noun (or adjective) form. By generic, I mean categories that do not refer to a particular chronological age. Members use a variety of generic age-membership category labels and each term has different ideological loading in

¹ I have chosen to represent the data in SMG spelling, and the CG phonemes in the most commonly used, although far from standardised, orthographic conventions (see e.g. Tsiplakou, 2004; Pavlou, 2004). The CG postalveolar fricatives that do not constitute part of the phonological inventory of SMG are represented with a letter of the Greek alphabet, modified with a down arrowhead on top of it (i.e. ζ̣ for the CG voiceless palatal fricative and ȝ for the voiced palatal fricative).

CG. One term used is *μεγάλη (γυναίκα)* pronounced /me'geli ji'neke/, which in Greek (both SMG and CG) means big or grown-up woman. It can therefore be employed to categorise members of the full range of ages. A possible English equivalent would be age categorisations such as “grown up” or “mature” (woman) which, as Katz (2001) argues, blur the boundaries between middle and old age, avoid old-age categorical ascription and can thus be employed in marketing to older people.

Κοτζάκαρη, pronounced /ko'tjekeri/, on the other hand, is a basilectal term of CG. Etymologically it derives from the Turkish words *koca* and *kari* meaning big woman. The term *kocakari* exists in Turkish and Turkish Cypriot and is a derogatory term for old women, similarly to its use in CG. The diminutives *κοτζακαρούα* or *κοτζακαρού* have similar connotations in CG, but could also be seen as emphasising age-related loss of body mass. This term is generally used in CG to refer to traditional Cypriot women, wearing a headscarf and black mourning dress and holding a cane, of rural origin and low educational level. Therefore, *κοτζάκαρη* is not just a descriptive term, as it has a marked low register (basilectal) and can function as a derogatory person reference. An English near-miss could be “crone”.

Ηλικιωμένη, pronounced /ilicio'meni/, is a term that is not exclusively found in CG, but is also used in SMG to refer to older adults. This term, along with third age(r) (*τρίτη ηλικία*), is also employed on formal occasions, e.g. in news reports about pensions and in policy documents (see Charalambidou, 2011). An English term with similar ideological loading would be elderly/older (citizens). Finally, *γριά*, pronounced /gri'e/, is also part of both the CG and SMG inventory, but is a more colloquial and less euphemistic term than *ilikiomeni*. An English near-miss would be “old woman”.

The table below shows which specific category term is used to refer to whom; categorisations may be directed to the self, to the self and others simultaneously (using an inclusive plural), to others present (excluding self), to others non-present (acquaintances who are not part of the group or to strangers) and to people in general. The original terms are reserved for the old-age categories. The numbers indicate how many times each term has been used overall in the eighteen hours of self-recordings. Columns with an F in the second row indicate categories in the female form or directed at women and columns with an M indicate categories employed in the male form.

Table I: Distribution of explicit old-age categorisation in noun form

Categorisation directed at:	κοτζάκαρη/ού F	Μεγάλη/ος F	M	Ηλικιωμένη/ος F	M	Γριά/Γέρος F	M	Τρίτη Ηλικία	Total
Self		1							1
Self and others	3	4		4				1	12
Other(s) present				1					1
Other(s) non present	13	14	5	7	2	8	4		53
Other(s) in general	1		1			1	1		4
Total per gender (f:female/m:male)	17	19	6	12	2	9	5	1	f:58 m:13
TOTAL	17	25		14		14		1	71

n=18 hours

It is noteworthy that most old-age categorisations are reserved, primarily, for others non-present (53 out of the 71 categories). Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of old-age (58 out of 71) categorisations refer to women. This is predictable, since all the participants are women and hence all categories directed at self and interlocutors would be in the female form. Also, the participants socialise primarily with women and in their conversations they also talk mostly about other women and not men, hence the large majority of categories directed at third parties are female. Furthermore, both categorising the self exclusively, as old, or one's interlocutors, excluding oneself, regardless of the specific term employed, are exceptionally rare (they appear only once each) which might be an indication that both activities are oriented to as dispreferred. The most frequently used old-age categorisations seems to be *μεγάλη/ος*.

Μεγάλη is used 25 times, followed by *κοτζάκαρη* (and its diminutive *κοτζακαρού*), which is encountered 17 times. Other terms employed in the data are *ηλικιωμένη/ος* and *γέρος/γριά*, encountered 14 times each. The least frequently used term is *τρίτη ηλικία*. For women in particular, *κοτζάκαρη/ού* are employed almost as frequently as *μεγάλη* (17 and 19 times each), followed by *ηλικιωμένη* (12 instances) and *γριά* (9 times). Below the two most frequently used terms *κοτζάκαρη* and *μεγάλη* and the ways participants use and contextualise them are further investigated.

2.2 “κοτζάκαρη”: a decline category

The following is a telling example of the attributions routinely associated with the category *κοτζάκαρη* in the data. It is part of a pre-arranged coffee gathering at Gregoria's house. Loulla had been to the accident and emergency section of the local hospital for a neck problem the morning before and is describing the various people she saw in the hospital with different conditions. At this point she talks about a patient she categorises as *κοτζάκαρη*.²

Excerpt 1 (participants: Gregoria, Loulla, Charoulla)

1. Λ μια κοτζάκαρη μες το κρεβάτιν πο' τ'χει: (.) καντζελλωμένον. (.) ↑ 'κόρη κοπελλούες
2. ανοίξετε το κόρη. κατεβάστε με.' >μα πού εν νά πάεις< γιαγιά' 'κατεβάστε με.'
3. μα <θκυο ώρες> Χαρούλλα μου ήταν απέναντι μου, [τξ ε]φώναζεν;
4. Γ [α:-]
5. = >εμάχουμουν να σου πω< μα πού τις είδες μες το κρεβάτι αλλά επήες εις
6. [το κρεβάτι]
7. Λ [↑μά:να μου.]ε(.)να την κατεβά:σουν τ'ξειαμαί κούρταλον <κοβάριν>ε
'περιμένουμεν
8. ↓ τη::ν (.) την άμπουλανς να'βρει καιρόν να'ρτει να την πάρει στο γηροκομείον' (.)
9. X φέρνουν τες τ'ζαι παίρνουν τες

² For turn-taking organisation, a simplified Jefferson's transcription system is used (see e.g. Schegloff, 2007b). An English translation is offered after the original.

1. L a *kojakari* in a bed over there: (.) with bars. (.) ↑‘*kori*³ girls
2. open up *kori*. put me down.’ >but where are you going< grandma’ ‘put me down.’
3. for <two hours> Charoulla she was opposite me, [and] was shouting;
4. G [a:-]
5. = >I was about to tell you< where did you see them in the bed but you went to
6. [the bed]
7. L [↑oh: dear.] em (.) to pu:t her down there an old crone <a tangle> em ‘we are waiting
8. for ↓the:: (.) the ambulance to find time to come and take her to the care home’ (.)
9. C they bring them and they take them back

The category *κοτζάκαρη* is associated in Excerpt 1 with attributions of frailty, poor physical health, mobility problems, poor mental state (from loss of primary cognitive functions of memory and attention to loss of awareness of the environment), very aged appearance etc. A number of other categorisations are also employed to emphasise the decrepitude of the *κοτζάκαρη*. Firstly, the nurses are reported to address her as “γιαγιά”/grandma (l.2), implying both significant age difference and also inappropriate intimacy (as a kinship term is employed to address as stranger in an institutional setting), a characteristic of patronising talk directed at older adults (cf. Hummert & Ryan, 2001). Also, in line 7 two additional categorisations, with emphatic intonation, are ascribed to the woman: *old crone* and *tangle* which emphasise the attributions of a distorted almost non-human external appearance of the *κοτζάκαρη*, and thus function as assessments. It is noteworthy that the markedly basilectal term for old crone, “κούρταλον”, is employed here to emphasise extreme age-related decline. In addition, she is associated with the locational formulation⁴ *care home* (l.8), also making relevant features of frailty and dependence. It is interesting that, once Loulla completes her story, Charoulla (l.9), referring to the *κοτζάκαρη*, employs third person plural (female form), placing the figure of the story as a member of a larger group of institutionalised old women (*kojakares*).

These negative features are also made relevant in sixteen out of the seventeen instances, where the term *κοτζάκαρη* is employed. In other interactional sequences, *κοτζάκαρη* is associated with loneliness, deep dependence, proximity to death, incontinence, wearing a headscarf, holding a cane and is dissociated from high sociability, and smooth, youthful complexion. In addition to decline attributions, this categorisation has connotations of being a traditional Cypriot woman, indexed primarily through dress, especially the headscarf. This constitutive attribution of the categorisation is hinted-at in two other instances, where a stiletto-wearing octagenarian is not

³ “Κόρη”/*Kori* is an invariant term of address, employed in CG to address female members of the same or of younger age. As it does not have a direct English equivalent, it is only transliterated in the extract translations.

⁴ This is Schegloff’s term for geographical locations, such as street addresses, “the cafe”, “my school” etc. (Hester & Eglin, 1997:9; Silverman, 1998:133).

characterised as *κοτζάκαρη* and in a conversation where headscarf-wearing *kojares* of yesteryear could well be chronologically young. Therefore, the salient Cypriot cultural construct that upholding traditions is constitutive of elderliness is made relevant here, but is also re-negotiated as associated with decline attributions, as well. On the whole, because the term is always bound to decline characteristics, it cannot be seen as a multi-valent term that is only occasionally associated with decline attributes. Also, because of its negative associations, in all these cases women categorised as *κοτζάκαρη* are either strangers or distant acquaintances and not friends or relatives. Furthermore, interlocutors skilfully try to dissociate themselves from this negatively loaded categorisation and its attributions.

2.3 “Μεγάλη γυναίκα”: The all-encompassing category

While *κοτζάκαρη* is a category associated with a more or less defined set of category-bound activities and features, and the participants would avoid categorising themselves as such, unless for a joke, these attributions do not apply to the other often-used term *μεγάλη (γυναίκα)*, which is mentioned 19 times in total. As mentioned in Section 2.1, above, this is a euphemistic term for old age and it could be extended to middle-agers. Also it lacks the low/dialectal register of *κοτζάκαρη*. In fact, in the recorded conversations, this category is never encountered in its basilectal variant of *μιάλη γεναίκα* (singular) or *μιάλες γεναίτιξες* (plural). Overall, in the data, although overwhelmingly associated with third age women, it has a much diffused and locally contingent meaning as far as category attributions go, and participants do not hesitate to claim it for themselves and others present. In the following example, Loulla and Myria are visiting Gregoria, and Loulla is recounting her experience at the local health centre, where she went for an eye check-up, the day before.

Excerpt 2 (participants: Loulla, Myria, Gregoria)

1. Λ ε:χτές που' μουν τζειαμαί ήρτεν μιαν: είδεν αποκόλλησιν.
2. Μ ↓α.
3. Λ μεγάλη γυναίκα σαν εμάς καμιάν εβδομηνταπενταρκά. °τζαι παραπάνω αν ήταν°.
4. (.) τζαι: ήταν τζείνη η Αγάθη η παχουλλή: (.)
1. L ye:sterday when I was there came a: she had a detachment.
2. M ↓oh.
3. L mega:li woman like us around seventy five. °she might be older°.
4. (.) a:nd there was that Agathi the chubby one: (.)

In line 3 Loulla categorises a woman as *μεγάλη* to perform the function of describing, since the person referred to has already been identified as a patient at the hospital, with a certain gynaecological problem, in line 1 (for the different functions of categories see Schegloff, 2007a). Loulla further specifies the age category *μεγάλη γυναίκα* (a) with the relational “like us” and (b) with an age-in-years feature (75 or

older), in line 3. The fact that *μεγάλη γυναίκα* is complemented by two additional age features suggests that it is a very broad age-category, insufficient to adequately identify a person's chronological age. Also, this person is categorised "like us", thus the other participants, Gregoria and Myria are also presented as co-incumbent of the category *μεγάλη γυναίκα*. No hesitation is indexed by the shape of the turn in line 3 and no contestation of the categorial ascription is indexed by the coparticipants. This then suggests that *μεγάλη γυναίκα* is apt for other- as well as self-categorisation, presumably because it is not necessarily bound to a set of decline attributions.

In this and other examples *μεγάλη* is accompanied with explicit mentions of chronological age, which suggests that it is too general a term to be a sufficient indicator of age-in-years. Nevertheless, on another occasion being fifty-three is constructed as too young to be categorised as *μεγάλη*. Finally, *μεγάλη* and its male equivalent *μεγάλος* are frequently juxtaposed to young-age categories, such as *κορούα*/"girl", *μιτσά*/"girl", *κοπέλλα*/"young woman", *νεαρή ηλικία*/"young age". On the whole, in most instances (19 out of the 21) *μεγάλη (γυναίκα)* categorises women above sixty-five and seventy. Therefore it could be classified as an old-age category.⁵ Below I turn briefly to two further types of age categorisation: mentions of chronological age and self-referential categorisations.

2.4 Age in years and self-categorisation as old

Along with generic old-age categorisations, a second set of categories appears frequently in the data, as can be seen in Extract 2. This additional collection comprises categorisations of chronological age and I call it age-in-years collection; some examples of age-in-years categories are "*είμαστε σχεδόν εβδομήντα χρονών*"/"we are almost seventy years old", "*εγώ έκλεισα τα εβδομήντα τρία*"/"I have reached seventy three", "*εν ογδοντατριών*"/"she is eighty three". As one would expect, disclosures of chronological age are more frequent for others non present, relatives or acquaintances of the interlocutors, rather than being self-referential, as participants are well aware of each other's age. Age-in-years and generic old-age categorisations are often made relevant as two distinct collections, where chronological age does not straightforwardly index a generic old-age category. On the whole, although ascriptions of chronological age seem to be bound to certain activities and can sometimes reinforce generic old-age categories, they do not index the latter in an easily identifiable way (e.g. 80 year olds are *kojakares*) but can also constitute a distinct class of age categorisations. This gives participants the flexibility to either construct age-in-years as a category-bound attribution to a generic old-age category or to claim/ascribe certain age-in-years categories without ratifying a particular generic old-age category or its attributions.

Finally, a number of old-age categorisations (thirteen out of seventy-one) are explicitly self-referential. Generic old-age self-categorisations in noun form are relatively rare and when they occur they are overwhelmingly in the plural. In the case of

⁵ In Table I, only the instances where *μεγάλη* is employed as an old-age category are included.

decline old-age categories (such as *κοτζάκαρη*), speakers employ a number of devices to distance themselves from these categories, such as reported speech, inclusion of these terms in hypothetical scenarios and construction of a humorous key. However, such distancing devices are not employed in the case of more positive old-age categories, such as *μεγάλη*. Categorisations in verb form have been shown to be a less dispreferred way of categorising self and others present as old and thus are employed in 9/10 of the cases, without any indication of hesitation. All but one self-categorisations are done in the plural. “We”, according to Hanks, lumps the speaker into a social group, in this case, of the interlocutors (and other social members) who are co-incumbents in the specific age category (Hanks, 1990:173; cf. Coupland et al., 1991:61; Poullos, 2004). Therefore, when participants categorise themselves with old-age categories, they also align themselves as co-members of the same social group as their interlocutors, and hence make relevant categorisations of in-groupness.

3. Concluding discussion

In this chapter, a number of different categorisation devices about age have been located. The collection of generic old-women categories, that is, categories that do not specify a particular chronological age, were oriented to by the participants as a set of hierarchically positioned categories associated with distinct activities and features. The case of *κοτζάκαρη*, repeatedly associated with decline attributions, is an example. On the contrary, *μεγάλη*, although it means “grown up woman”, was locally constructed as an old-age category that can be associated with both decline and counter-decline attributions. This category, which in other contexts (e.g. media data) does not categorise third agers, was recurrently negotiated as a flexible category that can be readily associated with positive or mild decline old-age attribution and is thus apt for self- and other- identification. Age-in-years functioned both as a feature of generic old-women categories and also as a distinct class of categories, without straightforward links to a certain generic category.

Overall, the participants ratify stereotypical/ageist assumptions about old age when they construct categorisations of *κοτζάκαρες*, yet they reserve these categorisations and their related decrepitude features for others. For themselves, contesting ageist stereotypes, the interlocutors construct age identities with more positive attributions. These categories, even though they share features of chronological age and sometimes poor physical health with other, decline old-age categories, are not incompatible with good mental state, high sociability, and youthful looks. This recurrent and joint construction of counter-decline and positive old-age identities for the self is achieved through:

- a) Constructing age-in-years as not essentially bound to old-age categories;
- b) Distancing and diffusing responsibility for self-referential, decline, old-age categories (with the use of plural, reported speech, teasing etc.);

- c) The construction of and self-association with old-age categories bound to positive or mild decline attributions; and
- d) The construction of and self-disassociation from old-age categories with heavy decline attributions.

In addition, members make relevant positive old-age identities through the use of these locally constructed categorisations. More specifically, members use at least two types of age categories for self- and interlocutors-categorisation: *μεγάλη* and age categorisations in verb form, mainly *εμεγαλώσαμε* (we have grown), both used in the self-recordings almost exclusively as third-age categorisations. Both of these categorisations are constructed as bound to no or mild decline attributions. Therefore members are able to categorise self and others as old, without, at the same time, accepting association with age-related decline. This is a rather novel finding, because in the literature, in the context of peer-elderly interactions, participants resort to distancing from old-age categories altogether, in order to construct a positive self-image. Paoletti (1998), Hurd (1999) and Degnen (2007) found that older women, in naturally occurring peer-group interactions, constructed the category “old” as a homogenising category, attributable to others, and associated with decline attributions and lack of agency (see also general Biggs, 1997; Jolanki, 2009; Gubrium, 2011 for research on older adults). The participants in these studies constructed a positive self-image by claiming the category “not old” (cf. Jolanki, 2009, who has documented similar findings in focus-group discussions of older adults). However, as Hurd points out (1999:431) this places members in the precarious position where health problems, changes in the body image and loss of spouse continually endanger their membership to the category “not old”.

In contrast, members of the present study are able to construct a positive self-image by ratifying membership to old-age categories that are not necessarily and exclusively bound to decline attributions. Therefore, through the self association with counter-decline old-age categories (instead of the category “not old”), participants were able to project positive age identities. Furthermore, certain mild-decline attributions (namely physical health and mobility issues that do not hinder social interaction) may be associated with positive old-age categories (*μεγάλη* and verb categorisations). Therefore, even if certain health issues became relevant, members could still claim membership to positive old-age categories. As a result, this research has shown that old-age categorisations applied to self did not necessarily entail decline attributions, nor were they employed to justify limitations.

Lastly, the large pool of linguistics resources that participants deploy is also associated with the attributions bound to the different age-related constructs. Looking into the use of register shifts in the self-recordings, it becomes obvious that, as Eckert argues, the meaning of the different variables and registers is not fixed or precise but they are rather associated with a constellation of potential meanings and interactional affects, each of which may be activated *in situ* (Eckert, 2008:453). Nevertheless, certain

patterns of emblematic uses of code-shifting (cf. Biber & Conrad, 2009:6) either to a more acrolectal or more basilectal register can be traced. More specifically, shifts to the Cypriot Greek basilect can emphasise advanced chronological age and age-related decline. On the other hand, shifts to SMG may be employed to add validity or seriousness to one's statements, e.g. about age-in-years and ageing (cf. similar findings in Albirini, 2011), to provide accounts and explanations and to mitigate face threats. It is telling that heavily basilectal age categorisations (including *κοτζάκαρη*) tend to have more negative connotations, whereas terms shared with SMG tend to be more generic and unmarked.

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